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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Tuesday, December 8, 1931.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "Popcorn and Raisins." Information approved by the Bureau of Plant Industry and the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

Bulletins available: "Popcorn," "Corn and Its Uses as Food," and "Food for Children."

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No sooner was I settled with paper and pencil last evening, all ready to give some serious thought to a radio chat, than in came our young friend, Horace, to make a call on Uncle Ebenezer. It was a business call, Horace explained. This year, it seemed, because he is six years old -- and easily a grown man -- he is to have his own money and buy Christmas gifts for his family all by himself. You can see that this is to be a great event in Horace's life. It puts a lot of responsibility on his shoulders. So, of course, it must be discussed seriously and at length. He had come over a few minutes before bedtime to have a chat, man to man, with Uncle Ebenezer. But Uncle Ebenezer unfortunately was out.

Horace made the best of the situation, however. He said he would come back tomorrow afternoon. And then he inquired politely what I was doing. I explained that I was about to compose a radio chat.

"May I help you?" he inquired, on his very best manners.

How could I do anything but reply, "Oh, thank you. I'm sure you can. Won't you sit down?"

"All right," said Horace, in a very businesslike tone. I could see at once that he meant to take the situation in hand. "Do you know what I'd talk about if I were you?"

"Please tell me."

"I'd talk about something good to eat -- awfully good to eat. Something like raisins maybe. I could eat a lot of raisins right now. They always make me think of Christmas dinner. Or you could talk about popcorn. I like that too. One year we had strings of popcorn and big popcorn balls to decorate our Christmas tree. After dinner we took off the balls and ate them. Tell me, Aunt Sammy, what makes popcorn pop?"

Just for Horace's sake I'm going to talk today about popcorn and raisins. And first thing, before I forget it, let me answer that question about why popcorn pops. Here's what the specialists over at the Bureau of Plant Industry have to say about that -- and they ought to know for they have made a study of the subject.

"Moisture stored in the kernels of popcorn is converted into steam when the corn is heated. And it is the pressure of this steam which causes popcorn to pop. Corn will not pop well if it contains too little or too much moisture.

"Popcorn stored where it is in contact with the outside air will usually have the right amount of moisture for popping. If it is too moist, exposure in a heated room will dry it out. If it is too dry, sprinkle it lightly with water and leave it in a tight container for a day or two, until the moisture is absorbed. Corn pops best when the fire is hot enough to make it begin to pop in about one and one-half minutes."

As for what to do with popcorn when it's popped, look in your green cook book. There are two excellent recipes for it -- one for balls made with nuts and a candy mixture something like taffy. If you like something a bit different, you can add chocolate to the candy syrup and have chocolate popcorn balls. I once attended a very nice party where we were served cunning very small popcorn balls instead of wafers or little cakes with our ice cream.

Another way to fix popcorn is to sugar it. This is very easy to do. You'll find directions in the radio cookbook on page 130. I'm glad to mention these recipes at this time of year when we're thinking of wholesome and inexpensive holiday sweets for the children. Popcorn sweets are not as concentrated in sugar and other rich materials as most candy, and therefore to be recommended for children. But no sweets of any sort, no matter how wholesome they may be or how popular with the children, are good for them at any time except at the end of the meal. To see, as I did in the park the other day, tots of three or four, munching candy and sweet crackers and so forth all the morning and just before meal-time -- well, a sight like that makes me sad and mad all at once.

Dried fruit sweets, because they contain the natural fruit sugar as well as valuable minerals like iron, are also good choices for the children.

And this, of course, brings us to Horace's second suggestion -- raisins.

Are raisins valuable foods? Have they a useful place in the diet? What food elements do they supply? These are some of the questions people ask.

Professor Cruess at the University of California recently made a talk on raisins. I'm going to answer these questions by quoting his talk:

"Until the beginning of the nineteenth century," he says, "drying was the only means of preserving fruit for long periods of time. It was between 1800 and 1810 that canning was discovered; artificial cold storage of fruits is still of more recent origin. Therefore, until about 100 years ago, only dried fruits were available during six to nine months of the year. Undoubtedly these dried fruits served a very important purpose in counteracting the bad effects of the simple

meat and bread diet that people had to depend on during most of the year in ancient, medieval and early modern times.

"Back in 1914 an investigator well known for his research on the effect of various foods in causing or preventing acidosis, found that raisins were effective in counteracting the acid-forming tendency of certain other foods, such as bread, meat and cereals. Now, though these acid-forming foods are essential in our diet, though they are good foods and good for us, nevertheless, taken exclusively and without enough fruits and vegetables, they may cause a form of acidosis. Acidosis, as the scientists explain it, is lowering the body's reserve alkalinity for the formation of acids. We never become acid in reaction and live; acidosis is to that extent not a correct term. What it means is lowering the alkaline reserve of the body.

"Raisins are rich in basic elements -- that is, in alkaline materials. And when a chemist burns raisins, an alkaline ash is obtained -- that is, one that will neutralize acids. In the body too, the raisins are burned to an ash by digestive and physiological processes; the natural fruit acids disappear, leaving alkaline bicarbonates. You know that a spoonful of bicarbonate of soda after a large and rich meal makes you feel less distressed; one reason for this effect is the neutralization by the bicarbonate of acids formed during digestion of the roast turkey or French rolls or other food that has an acid reaction. Raisins act in the same way as the baking soda and are not 'so hard to take.' Probably experience has taught Europeans the value of raisins for this purpose, for on Continental European dining tables you will usually find raisins served at the end of the meal.

"Recently these early experiments with raisins have been confirmed by Saywell of the University of California. He placed four men on a strongly acid-forming diet until they had developed marked acidosis. He then added raisins to this acid diet and within twenty-four hours found that the acidosis had markedly decreased. Within three days all four men had returned to normal condition. The results were clear-cut and very striking.

"Raisins are rich in the two fruit sugars -- levulose and dextrose. These digest rapidly in the body and serve as sources of quickly available energy. The body burns sugar during exercise. Raisins can well be used as a between-meal food to supply this needed energy, particularly to active children, sportsman and hikers. A pocketful of raisins goes well on the trail as they furnish not only energy but the extremely valuable basic elements previously mentioned.

"The sugars of raisins, and sugars from other sources as well, cause fats and oils to digest more easily and completely. The biochemist explains it by saying, 'Fats burn more brightly in the body in the flame of sugars.' For this reason, as well as to make the sandwich taste better, it is not amiss to grind or chop a few raisins and mix them with the chopped olives and mayonnaise used as sandwich filling.

"While all its functions in the body are not fully understood, potassium is an extremely valuable and necessary constituent of our blood. It is believed also that it is of importance in regulating heart action. Raisins are richer than any other fruit in this element."

So much for the credit side of the raisin account. What important food factors are lacking in raisins? Well, like all fruits, they contain but little protein; this we must get elsewhere as in meat, milk, cheese, eggs, bread cereals, and so forth. Secondly, like all dried fruits they are lacking in Vitamin C, the so-called "orange-juice" vitamin. Therefore, don't forget oranges when you are making up the family menu. Children particularly need orange or tomato juice.

Wednesday: "Choosing Books for the Child."

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